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Heart Disease Info-Sheet for Seniors

Aging and Seniors

As you grow older, your chances of developing heart disease increase. Coronary heart disease accounts for the highest percentage of cardio-vascular disease in seniors, half of which are fatal or lead to heart attacks.

A **heart attack** occurs when the blood supply to part of the heart muscle itself is severely reduced or stopped due to blockage, leading to permanent damage to that part of the heart.

What are the symptoms and warning signs?

The most common symptoms and warning signs of a heart attack are:

Pain

Sudden shortness of breath, discomfort or crushing heaviness, pressure or squeezing in the chest, fullness or burning in the chest.

Pain in the centre of the chest spreading

Pain that spreads down one or both arms, up to neck, jaw, shoulder or back.

Other signs

Sudden shortness of breath, dizziness, lightheadedness, sweating or weakness, nausea, vomiting and/or indigestion, anxiety or fear, denial, refusing to admit that anything is wrong.

Warning signs in women

Women are more likely to have less obvious symptoms such as indigestion-like discomfort, vague chest pressure or discomfort, nausea or back pain. It is crucial for women and their doctors not to ignore those easy-to-miss symptoms.

If you notice any of these signs, don't delay!

Consult your doctor immediately.

The longer an artery remains blocked the more damage it may cause. Delay in the early phases can significantly reduce the chances of survival. Yet Canadians wait an average of almost 5 hours before getting help. It is extremely important to recognize the signals and to respond immediately.

Who is at risk?

Some risk factors for heart disease cannot be altered, while others can be modified by lifestyle changes. Major risk factors you can't change include age and family history. Risk factors you *can* change or control include smoking, high blood pressure, high "bad" cholesterol (LDL) levels, lack of physical activity, diabetes and obesity.

Tobacco

A smoker's risk of heart attack is 2-3 times higher than that of a non-smoker. Quitting, at any

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Heart Disease Info-Sheet for Seniors

As you grow older, your chances of developing heart disease increase. Coronary heart disease accounts for the greatest percentage of cardio-vascular deaths in seniors, half of which are attributable to heart attacks.

A **heart attack** occurs when the blood supply to a part of the heart muscle itself is severely reduced or stopped due to blockage, resulting in damage to that part of the heart.

What are the symptoms and warning signs?

The main symptoms and warning signs of heart attack are:

Chest pain

- tightness, discomfort or crushing
- heaviness, pressure or squeezing
- fullness or burning

Pain from the centre of the chest spreading

- down one or both arms
- up to neck, jaw, shoulder or back

Other signs

- shortness of breath
- paleness, sweating or weakness
- nausea, vomiting and/or indigestion
- anxiety or fear
- denial, refusing to admit that anything is wrong

Warning signs in women

Women are more likely to have less obvious symptoms such as indigestion-like discomfort, vague chest pressure or discomfort, nausea or back pain. It is crucial for women and their doctors not to ignore those easy-to-miss symptoms.

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Tobacco

A smoker's risk of heart attack is 2-3 times than that of a non-smoker. Quitting, at any



age, is beneficial. Chronic exposure to second-hand smoke may also increase the risk of heart disease.

High blood pressure

High blood pressure increases the heart's workload, causing the heart to enlarge and weaken over time. When high blood pressure exists with obesity, smoking, physical inactivity, high blood cholesterol levels or diabetes, the risk of heart attack increases greatly. Although the cause of most high blood pressure is unknown, it can be controlled.

Because high blood pressure often has no obvious symptoms, it is crucial that you understand your doctor's instructions and stick to your medication.

High cholesterol

The risk of heart disease rises as levels of "bad" cholesterol (LDL) increase. When other risk factors (high blood pressure, smoking, physical inactivity, etc.) are present,

this risk increases even more. You can achieve a healthy level of cholesterol by adopting a diet that is low in fat and high in fibres (see *Prevention* section).

Lack of exercise

Physical activity can help protect people of middle and old age against heart disease. Any exercise, at any age, is beneficial if done regularly over the long term.

Exercise also helps control cholesterol, diabetes, obesity and high blood pressure. Make a habit of exercising regularly: physical activity can and should be fun!

Consult your doctor before embarking on a physical activity program.

Obesity

People who are more than 30% over their ideal body weight are more likely to develop heart disease, even if they have no other risk factors. Obesity increases the strain on the heart, contributes to high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol and can lead to adult-onset diabetes.

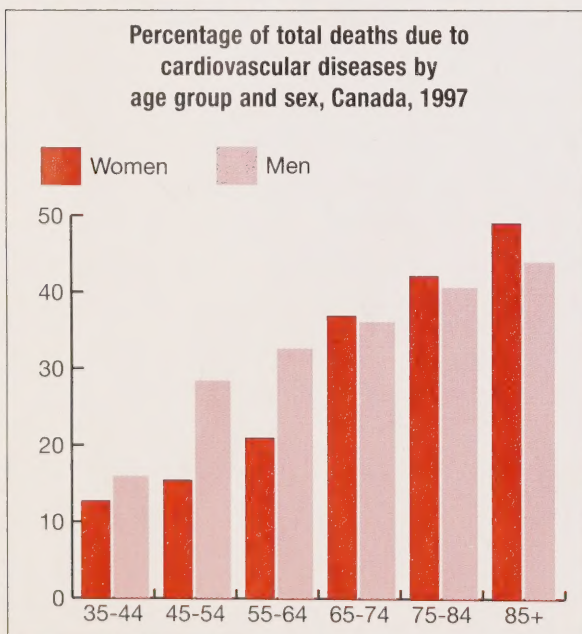
Diabetes

Diabetes seriously increases the risk of developing heart attacks but heart disease may be avoided or delayed by controlling other risk factors.

Stress

Stress can contribute to the development of heart disease. People under stress also tend to indulge in unhealthy activities such as smoking or overeating. Taking time to exercise, enjoying outdoor activities, and eating a healthy diet helps reduce stress levels.

Statistics Canada & Health Canada. *The Changing Face of Heart Disease and Stroke in Canada 2000.*





Prevention

Even at a later age, you can reduce your risk of heart disease by adopting healthy habits such as:

- ♥ being smoke-free
- ♥ eating a healthy diet
- ♥ controlling your blood pressure
- ♥ being physically active
- ♥ taking time to relax

Adopting a healthy diet

For everyone, at any age, it is important to eat three balanced meals a day and to take time to enjoy what you eat. The foods you choose have a direct impact on your health. Healthy ingredients and cooking techniques will help you lose weight, keep “bad” cholesterol levels to a minimum, prevent illness and improve your general well-being.

Look at diet changes as an exciting adventure toward renewed health. Discover new vegetables, spices and recipes. Enjoy preparing, eating and sharing your healthy meals!

For more information on healthy eating, consult *Canada's Food Guide*:
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/nutrition/pube/foodguid/foodguide.html
or call (613) 954-5995 to order a copy of the guide.



Eating healthy...

Eat high-fibre foods everyday...

such as fruit and vegetables, peas, beans and lentils, barley, brown rice, whole grain bread and whole grain cereals.

Use as little salt as you can...

replace it with herbs and spices (tarragon, basil, dill, curry) or tasty ingredients (garlic, lemon juice, hot peppers, flavoured vinegars).

Cook with little or no fat...

if you must use fat, use vegetable oils (olive, canola, corn, sunflower). Always use as little as you can.

Eat less meat, especially red meat...

limit your portion to the size of a deck of cards. Choose leaner cuts of meat and cut off the fat or remove the skin before cooking. Try low-fat cooking methods (steaming, broiling, barbecue, roasting, stir-frying, poaching) or meatless meals.

Choose low-fat dairy products...

such as skim or 1% milk, low fat yogurt and cottage cheese (containing 2% and less fat) and cheese containing less than 15% M.F.

Avoid high-fat desserts and snacks...

but treat yourself with your favorite delight once in a while... in moderation!



Treatment

Treatment for heart attacks may include medication, such as

- anti-coagulant drugs (to prevent clots from forming);
- thrombolytic drugs (known as “clot-busters” or “clot-dissolvers”);
- drugs to lower blood pressure or to decrease heart rate;
- nitroglycerin (to relax the blood vessels);
- cholesterol lowering drugs.

Sometimes drugs used to treat or prevent irregular heart rhythms will also be given. Treatment may also involve surgery, including angioplasty (balloon pumps).

For more information

Contact the Heart and Stroke Foundation toll free at 1-888-HSF-INFO.

Health Canada's *Physical Activity Guide for Older Adults* can help you increase your level of activity (www.paguide.com or 1-888-334-9769).

Many Internet sites also provide information about heart health. Here are a few you may want to visit:

www.heartandstroke.ca
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hppb/ahi/healthyheartkit
www.healthyheart.org
<http://hsf.ca> <http://ccs.ca>
www.cacr.ca www.hc-sc.gc.ca
www.canadian-health-network.ca

Our thanks to the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada for its contribution to this Info-Sheet.

Division of Aging and Seniors

About medication...

Your doctor may prescribe medication for blood pressure, heart disease, or another condition.

It is crucial that you fully understand your doctor's instructions and that you take your medication exactly as prescribed. Write down your questions as they come and refer to your list during your doctor's appointment.

- ✓ If you have been taking other medications, ask your doctor if you should continue taking these.
- ✓ Ask your doctor written information on the medication you are being prescribed.
- ✓ Check with your pharmacist before taking any over-the-counter medications such as aspirin or cold remedies.
- ✓ Never stop taking your medication without talking to your doctor.
- ✓ Report any side effects to your doctor or pharmacist.

You should be able to answer these common questions about each of your medications:


- ✓ What is the name of the medication and what does it do?
- ✓ How and when do I take it?
- ✓ Are there any side effects and what should I do if I get any?
- ✓ What food, drinks, or other medications should I avoid?

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